

You Are Set Free

Luke 13:10-17

In the place of worship, Jesus sees a woman crippled for 18 years by a spirit. Luke says that when Jesus saw her, he called her over, and said, "Woman, you are set free from your ailment." When he laid hands on her, immediately she stood up straight, and began praising God. Let's pray:

Come to us, Lord Jesus, come to us and stand us up straight, and guide us so that we can bring our thanks to you. In Jesus' name, amen.

There's a photo I'd like you to take a look at. It didn't make the beautiful history that was written by Heidi Winnen, I don't think. But some other photos came to light of some people that might have something to do with us. Do you know where this photo's been taken? "Here," David's saying, and where he's pointing is right on this spot. Yes, some of those people might have been standing right on that very spot, mightn't they? So who are they? Who are those people? Maybe some of you with good eyes might say, "Yes, I think I can pick out ..." whomever it might be.



My question is today, who are they, and what were they expecting?

What were they hoping for? What was God doing among them? What would God do?

It's a similar set of questions that I ask also of Luke 13 today, as we heard in the Gospel reading a little bit earlier. Who's in *that* picture? What were they expecting? And what was God up to? What's God doing?

"Well, the short version, pastor, is that it's pretty straight-forward. There's a woman who's healed during worship." But there's a lot more to it than that, I think. I think it's a story that also tells us something of our own journeys in this life. Perhaps a story of us, as we know, being in need of some healing. From time to time we face all sorts of things — we face death, and grief; we face being violated by others; we face hurt and anger, and all sorts of things. And I think that sometimes, we face that not just as individuals, but as a community.

One of the ways that I've found helpful to understand the situation at St Paul's at the moment is by going back and trying to understand what makes up grief, whether for a person or for a body of people coming to grips with something very, very difficult. I've been helped a little bit by Elizabeth Kubler Ross' ground-breaking work on working through grief, and I think that the stages that she articulates are helpful for me (and I hope it may be helpful for you too).



Amongst people in our community I've recognised things of denial. I've recognise things like anger in our community. I've recognised things like bargaining — if I do this then something else will happen this way, perhaps. In our community, there's depression; and there's also acceptance, acceptance of news that's come to us.

It's in this context that we know that many people have been hurting here for a long time, and many people hurt now, for different reasons. But it's in this context that I'd like us to listen again to the Gospel reading, as we

unpack it somewhat.

Jesus is in the synagogue — he's in the worship place where he often went. And as we read Luke's Gospel, this is the last time before Jesus goes to the cross that he'll be in a synagogue; and I reckon he's going to make it count! So let's listen in... But to understand it better, I'd like us first to listen to the very *first* time that Jesus is in a synagogue, as happens in Luke chapter 4 from verse 14:

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, —

Did you hear the words about the woman who was bent over and crippled? It was a disabling *spirit*. Here, Jesus comes in the power of the Holy Spirit. Just after he's been tempted (in the desert), he:

returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read —

That's what the teachers did...

and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me —

And here are the things that he has anointed me to do, so listen in for the *verbs*, the doing words, if you will.

to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

Now, he's reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, from chapter 61; and what's in Isaiah 61 that's not here, by the way — that Jesus does *not* read aloud — is a word of vengeance. Jesus *doesn't* bring this word as he reads from the scroll!

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.

Now this was *not* what he was supposed to do. He's supposed to talk about this stuff. But he sits down! So no wonder everyone that's in the synagogue *looks* at this Jesus — what's he doing? What's he going to do next? What's God up to, amongst us?

The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today — Now. Here.

this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

(Luke 4:14-21)

Jesus is the doer of this Word. Jesus is the *living* Word among people. He comes to bring good news. He comes to release captives. He comes to bring life, and to bring hope — not only is he this Messiah that was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah, but he's the one who *does* what the Word says.

And if you want to know what Luke's Gospel is all about, if you want it in a nutshell, if you need the short version, then go to Luke chapter 4, and then read everything else that is in the 24 chapters around it in light of what goes on there; and you'll see what God is up to.

So let's go back to Luke 13 in that light from Luke 4. Jesus is teaching in the synagogue again, and a woman who's there, who's been facing this terrible life for these 18 years, a sickness — Jesus sees her; Jesus comes to her; Jesus calls her, and he says, "You are set free." You are set free! And she

then leads the praise of God's people — she is the leader of it, despite the cries, the constant cries (if you read the Greek, it's a constant outcry) from this synagogue leader. Nonetheless, she leads the praise — Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices — stood up straight to live life. Trust, faith, joy — joy in God's grace for us, even though some are stuck in the place of the law. God's way is a way of healing. And the fulness of this will be played out in the chapters that follow in Luke's Gospel, where Jesus — for you, for me, for all people — goes to the Cross, and takes on his body the fulness of the infirmity of sin.

And yet he come to a beautiful place of sunlight — the Son rising to bring new light and new life, full healing for you and for me, eternally.

No wonder, then, that Luke's Gospel finishes with the disciples again in worship. If you read the last verses of Luke's Gospel, they finish with those disciples in worship, praising God in the temple. And as they start out the new part of their journey in Acts — that's the continuation of Luke's story — they too receive this same healing Spirit, to go with a Word that brings life.

So, that's the story of Luke. What about the story here? So who were these people? What were they expecting? And what was God doing?

Well, we *know* part of this story! We know that God built something — he built this place that we're in. And there he built a place where he might come to his people, to keep bringing his healing, his life; and to keep standing people up, despite the things that they face.



What were they thinking then? Who are they? What's God up to?

What about these people? What about this mob? Do you recognise anyone in there? It could be the back of your head, or mine, I reckon. Who are they? What are they expecting? And what's God up to?

The same Jesus comes to you and me, dear friends in Christ, as a God of healing, a God of hope, a God of life. He comes to set free, to set the path anew.

Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices. Amen.



This address followed a performance of Bach's cantata BWV 192, which is based on the original text now translated as hymn 106 in Together in Song, "Now thank we all our God".